

---

GENERAL VIEW  
OF THE  
AGRICULTURE  
OF  
*MERIONETHSHIRE.*

---



GENERAL VIEW



NEWCASTLE

GENERAL VIEW  
OF THE  
AGRICULTURE  
AND  
RURAL ECONOMY  
OF  
*MERIONETHSHIRE.*  
WITH  
OBSERVATIONS ON THE MEANS OF IMPROVING IT,  
By GEORGE KAY.  
DRAWN UP  
FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE  
AND INTERNAL IMPROVEMENT.

---

EDINBURGH:  
PRINTED BY JOHN MOIR.  
1794.







TO THE READER.

---

IT is requested that this paper may be returned to the Board of Agriculture, at its office in London, with any additional remarks and observations which may occur on the perusal, *written on the margin*, as soon as may be convenient.

It is hardly necessary to add, that this report is, at present, printed and circulated for the purpose merely of procuring farther information respecting the Husbandry of this district, and to enable every one to contribute his mite to the improvement of the country.

THE Board has adopted the same plan, in regard to all the other Counties in the United Kingdom; and will be happy to give every assistance in its power, to any person who may be desirous of improving his breed of cattle, sheep, &c. or of trying any useful experiment in Husbandry.

LONDON, }  
June 1794. }

1.0000  
1.0000



---

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

**T**HIS county is bounded, on the west, by the sea and part of Caernarvonshire; on the north, it touches Caernarvon and Denbighshires; on the east, Denbigh and Montgomeryshires; and on the south, it is separated from Cardiganshire in South Wales, by the river Dovy. Its shape is irregularly triangular, running out into a narrow point on the south west. It contains 500,000 acres, divided into six hundreds, in which are 37 parishes, and 4 market towns.

Merionethshire is the most rough and mountainous of all the Welsh counties, and presents as many rugged precipices as Caernarvonshire; yet the mountains, although more numerous, are not as high as those of Snowdon, nor are the precipices so tremendous as Penmaenmaur, and some others. This county, however, exhibits a much more pleasant appearance, from its being better embellished with woods. There are also a great variety of plains and beautiful valleys, interspersed amongst the mountains, with several large lakes, and a great number of smaller ones. The staple is sheep. Black cattle are also reared in great numbers, and some of the vales produce oats, and a little barley. Wheat is also raised on the sea coast, but in very small quantities. This county is by no means calculated for corn.

*Soil.*—The nature and quality of the soil is very variable. There is a vast quantity of peat or moss, and many morasses, that require to be drained; but the most prevalent soil on which the corn is cultivated, is gravel and loam.

A

*Climate.*



*Climate.*—With regard to climate, there is more rainy weather and more snow in this county, than in any of North Wales; and for three years past, it has been particularly wet. The cultivation of corn must therefore be a very precarious business.

*Wood lands.*—This county, although better wooded than Caernarvonshire, is yet in many places very bare of trees. Oak is the principal timber raised, and the wood lands are frequently very little attended to; not only in regard to the insufficiency of the fences, through which the cattle pass, and destroy the plantations; but also in regard to pruning and thinning, both of which, though highly important, are very seldom practised. And although the tenants are prohibited, by their landlords, from keeping goats, still there are a few of those destructive animals in the county, which get over the walls, and browse upon the young plantations; and where the trees are so high that they cannot easily get at the branches, they stand erect, and pull them down, with their fore legs, holding them in that manner until they totally destroy the tree. Very few gentlemen reside in the county, to look after their own interest, which may be the cause of so much inattention. Their estates are intrusted to the management of agents, who seldom look after any thing but the rents, and thus great losses are sustained through their neglect. It is well known that wood lands, kept under a proper system, are, in sheltered places among hills, much sooner brought to perfection, than those in an exposed situation.

*Enclosures and Fences.*—The lands in this county are mostly enclosed, the sheep walks excepted. The enclosures are in general small, being most approved of. There are few hedges, dry-stone walls being the most common fence, some of which are built as high as 6 feet, with broad coping stones, projecting 6 inches, which however do not prevent the sheep from getting over them. They are so very active, that they run up the walls like a squirrel, especially when their pasture turns bare. Enclosing has been found to increase the rents astonishingly,



ingly, at least double, and frequently triple ; and it is likewise understood to increase population ; all the sheep walks, or mountains in this county, are appropriated, and the land marks are well ascertained, but no division is thought of.

*Draining and Embanking.*—There is a very great quantity of land that might be highly improved by draining, but as few proprietors reside in the county, it is almost totally neglected. William Oakely of Tanybwllch, Esq; has embanked and drained a most delightful vale, (which was formerly overflowed by the sea, at spring tides,) which now affords three times the quantity of pasture and hay it formerly did, and of a very superior quality. And as he will soon be able to flood it, (which he is not as yet quite prepared for, the drains being not altogether finished,) he will still increase the quantity of both amazingly. The soil in general is of a mossy nature, consequently the drains have been cast at a very small expence. The main drains are very deep and wide, and constitute part of the fence ; but the smaller or covered drains are 4 feet deep, 2 feet wide at top, and gradually contracted to 3 inches at the bottom. The cost is 4d. *per* yard. Spades are constructed for the purpose, being made narrower at the point than at the head. The top sod or turf, which is strongly matted with the roots of different kinds of vegetables, is applied as a covering to the drain with its sward turned downwards, and being properly shaped, is driven hard down, within eight or nine inches of the bottom, leaving a vacuity of these dimensions for the water. The upper part is afterwards filled with the earth that was thrown out, and because it subsides considerably, it is raised above the surface some inches. These drains last a great many years ; for after land is once thoroughly drained, it requires very little trouble to keep it free of superfluous water. Edward Corbet of Ynyfymangwyn, has made very great improvements by embanking and draining. Within these last 12 years, he has improved in that way 261 acres, the average rent of



|                                                 |         |            |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|
| of which was formerly only 9d. <i>per</i> acre, | -       | L. 9 15 9  |
| Present value 144½ acres, at 30s.               |         |            |
| <i>per</i> acre,                                | -       | L. 217 2 6 |
| Ditto, 116½ ditto, at 40s.                      | 233 0 0 |            |
|                                                 | <hr/>   | 450 2 6    |

The difference of value annually - L. 440 6 9

*Expence of improvement.*

|                                                  |             |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Embanking 1980 yards, at 2s. 6d. <i>per</i> yard | L. 247 10 0 |
| Draining 7942 ditto, 0 7½d. <i>per</i> ditto     | 248 3 9     |
| Sundry other improvements -                      | 40 6 3      |
| Embanking, 2310 yards 1s. 3d. <i>per</i> yard -  | 144 7 6     |
| Draining, 4510 ditto 0 7½d. <i>per</i> ditto -   | 140 18 9    |

Total expence, L. 821 6 3

The additional rent being 440l. 6s. 9d. is more than 50 *per cent. per annum* for his money. Mr Corbet has still a great quantity of waste land to improve, which can be done at a still smaller expence, as there is no embankment requisite. There is also a tract of private property, that lies contiguous to his, which might also be improved at a very trifling expence; and it is astonishing that the proprietor has not seen it his interest, from the improvements made by Mr Corbet. The soil of Mr Corbet's improved land was chiefly peat or mofs; but by ploughing, and the application of lime, and afterwards by flooding, it is now almost converted into a rich loam.

*Waste Lands.*—The waste lands in Merionethshire are of very considerable extent, and by embanking and draining in some places, and by draining alone in others, might be converted into fine pasture, or hay lands; the precariousness of the weather being much against the raising of corn crops. There are about 600 acres in the neighbourhood of Torvin, adjoining the property of Mr Corbet, of which 300 acres are peat or turf, 200 sand, and 100 strong clay, which are not at present worth 6d. *per* acre; but, by being embanked and drained, might be made worth 20s. *per* acre, at least. Upon the river Dovy there are



500 acres, private property, not now worth 5s *per acre*, but, by embanking and draining, might be made worth 2l. *per acre*; and I was informed the whole expence would not exceed 300l.

At Traeth Mawr, and Traeth Bychar, there are about 4,000 acres, which are common, and capable of the highest improvement, by embanking and draining. Harlach marsh, consisting of about 600 acres, is also very capable of improvement, and at a very small expence, as neither much embanking nor draining are required; there is likewise a great quantity of land in the interior parts of this county that requires to be drained and inclosed.

*Flooding or Watering of Lands*—Merionethshire is finely supplied with rivers and rivulets, for the purpose of flooding the land, yet it is seldom practised, although it is found to fertilize the soil more than any manure. Mr Corbet, of whose improvements I have already had occasion to take notice, has done more in this way than any person in North Wales. He overflows from 4 to 500 acres annually, and allows not a drop of water to escape him, that he can command; by which means he has very early spring food for his cattle, and some of his fields are grazed till the first of June, which are afterwards cut for hay in the beginning of August, producing two tons. He considers his after grafs worth 20s. *per acre*. The streams of water that flow down the sides of the mountains, or sheep walks, being strongly impregnated with the dung of the sheep, must be of a very fertilizing quality. The value put upon the waste lands which Mr Corbet has improved, is certainly low, the highest being computed at only 40s. *per acre*. Whereas, from its being all flooded, and from the great quantity of pasture and hay produced, I should think it worth almost double that sum. Some farmers in his neighbouring have lately begun to adopt his plan, but on a very limited scale.

*Roads*.—Good roads are one of the first improvements of a country, which, however, have been long neglected in



Merionethshire; but now that work is begun, and the turnpike roads are amending daily, in all the parts of the county. They are, in my opinion, formed too narrow; for in many places they do not exceed 20 feet, in others 30. The want of funds may be the reason assigned for this; but it is not a good one, because 40 feet, which is not too broad, might be marked out, although no more of it were made than at present, which could easily be done afterwards, when the funds encrease; for it is a mistaken notion to suppose, that a narrow road is easier kept in repair than a wide one; on the contrary, a broad road is less expensive after it is once made, by allowing the carriages to shift their track, particularly in wet weather.

*Extent of Farms, &c.*—The lands in this county are occupied by small farmers, 100l. being a great and very unfrequent rent. The farms do not rent, upon an average, 30l. They are principally employed in pasture. Sheep is the chief object, being best calculated for a mountainous country. The farm houses are in general very bad, and almost without any kind of offices, nor have the farmers leases in general.

*Manures.*—Lime is the chief manure in this county, and is found to be of very great utility, where it is applied. Mr Corbet has experienced the good effects of it, in a most astonishing degree, on the lands he has lately improved, the greater part of which was peat moss; but by the application of lime and dung, with frequent ploughing, the soil seems now to be converted into a kind of black loam, which I have formerly mentioned, and is as productive as the best lands in the county. Little dung is made, owing to the want of houses for the cattle.

*Crops.*—Very little corn is cultivated in Merionethshire, and scarcely any green crops. Oats are the principal grain raised, with a little barley, and still less wheat. Turnips have been tried, and answer exceedingly well, but are very seldom sown. Potatoes are less cultivated than they ought to be. Mr Corbet  
has



has raised immense crops of them, as well as turnips, on his new improved lands. The potatoe crops were worth 20l. *per* acre. Summer fallow is seldom practised. Clover is sometimes sown, and is found to answer amazingly well, when the land is properly prepared for it. Mr Corbet always sows parsley and white clover, which he considers to be very healthy for the cattle, on account of its diuretic quality, which prevents them from swelling.

*Live Stock.*—The breed of sheep in this county is the most pure of any in North Wales, and is likely to continue so, from an apprehension of the scab, foot rot, gogles and other disorders being introduced, by crossing with other breeds, which is the case in Anglesey and Caernarvonshire, but which Merionethshire is now unacquainted with. The scower is the only disorder known in this county. The breed is domesticated and very hardy, and no other attempt has been made to improve it, except sending for a ram to Tallyllyn, (at the foot of Kader Idris, the highest mountain in Merionethshire,) where the most admired and best breed in North Wales is to be found. They are much longer bodied than the common breed. Mr Corbet, one of the first improvers in North Wales, has invariably followed this plan, by which means he has improved his stock so very considerably, that he sold his wedders this year for 19s. a head, whereas the common and ordinary price given was only 13 s. for well fed wedders. The average weight is about 10 lib *per* quarter, averdupois, and the average weight of a fleece, 2 lib. worth 1s. *per* lib. The wool is white, and is all manufactured into webbs and flannels in the county. The webbs sell from 14d. to 18d. *per* yard, and the flannels from 15d. to 2s. 6d. *per* yard. The practice of clipping twice a year is confined to the neighbourhood of Kader Idris, and from that to the vale of Towyn; where the sheep are clip'd in June and at Michaelmas. The summer fleece is always the largest; at Michaelmas the tail is never clip'd. The wool is left for the purpose of keeping the animal warm in the winter time.



time. Clipping twice a year is found to produce no additional quantity of wool, but those that practise it think the wool finer in quality, which however is denied by those who clip only once, as their wool fells as high as the other. In many parts of this county, the fore parts are clip'd at Michaelmas; in others, only about the neck. The sheep are always kept upon the mountains, except the ewes, which are brought down at the lambing season. They commonly produce one lamb at a birth, and the lambs are always fed in the valleys the first winter, being unable to endure the storms of frost and snow, which they would be more exposed to on the mountains, in the winter season. The lambing season is generally in March and April. The lamb is well wooled, and very lively when born. The practice of laying sheep with tar is altogether unknown in this county, nor is the want of it felt as an inconvenience, though the climate is as cold, and the storms as boisterous as in any part of Scotland. The mutton in this county is reckoned incomparably good, and is at its best at 6 years old. I have now only to take notice of a strange opinion held in this county, in regard to the feeding of sheep, viz. That pasturing them in the spring on lands that have been flooded, is apt to produce the scower. Mr Corbet assured me, and he is the only gentleman in the county that has had any experience in this way, that he never felt any bad effects from it; on the contrary, the early spring food produced by that operation, has greatly improved his flock. Part of his mountains are also flooded, from which he derives very great advantages.

*Black Cattle.*—The pure or native breed of black cattle are reckoned the most contemptible of any in Wales. They are small, and very ill shaped. Mr Corbet is not less remarkable for a fine breed of black cattle, than of sheep. He has brought into this county English bulls, and a great many cows of the most approved kinds, which he has found to be as hardy as the native breed, and much more profitable. He shewed me a most striking contrast between the breed of the county, and the  
the



the English breed; two cows of the same age, that were reared together, the one was only worth 5l. or 6l. and the other worth 12l. The great attention paid to the flooding of his lands, gives him a decided superiority in point of stock, as he has spring food for his cattle, at least two months sooner than any person in the county, by which means they are always kept in good order.

*Horses.*—There are few horses bred in Merionethshire, and those that are reared for draught are light and weakly, consequently very ill calculated for it. Mr Corbet breeds blood, or galloping horses. His mares are thorough bred, and he has them covered by the best blood horses in England. He also breeds road, and hunting horses, of which he has a large young stock, all appearing very promising. He has built a number of paddocks, for his breeding mares, all of which are flooded and very convenient.

*Swine.*—The rearing of pigs is considered a very profitable business in this county, consequently a great many are bred, and fed in the same manner as in the other Welsh counties.

*Goats.*—Goats are by no means common, being reckoned not so profitable as sheep, and much more destructive to the plantations. For these reasons, (so much attached were the old tenants to old customs,) the proprietors were under the necessity of prohibiting them from keeping goats; and notwithstanding a few still persist in it, often to the great detriment of their neighbours.

*Implements of Husbandry.*—The ploughs, carts, harrows, &c. are the same in Merionethshire, as those generally used in North Wales, and both horses and oxen are employed, and very badly managed.

*Paring and Burning.*—The practice of paring and burning is still common in this county, although in many places the bad effects of it are easily discerned. It is frequently done, where the soil is so thin as not to admit of it; by which means, the land produces almost nothing. Many of the proprietors prohibit their

C

tenants



tenants from pursuing this method, which is highly proper, as it is often very unjudiciously done, perhaps for the sake of one good crop only.

*Price of Labour.*—The labourers work from 5 in the morning till 7 at night in the summer season, for a shilling; and in winter, when the days are short, for 8d. *per* day, without victuals.

*Price of Provisions.*—The price of provisions in this county is as low as in Caernarvonshire. The labourers and common people live chiefly upon oat meal, milk, cheese, and the produce of their gardens, where they commonly raise potatoes, cabbage, greens, &c.

*Towns and Manufactures.*—The towns in Merionethshire are very small. Harlech, which is situated on the sea coast, although the capital of this county, is a poor place, without trade, and remarkable only for its castle, built by Edward the first. Dolgellhen, Dinasmowthwy, and Bala, are the principal towns where webs and flannels are manufactured, which are also very general throughout the county. Besides the produce of Merionethshire, large quantities of wool are bought in Denbighshire, and wrought up here. Knit woolen stockings are also a great branch of trade. Barmouth, the only sea port, stands on an arm of the sea, whence considerable quantities of the manufactures of the county are exported. The river Avon, and many smaller rivulets, discharge themselves into it, and it is navigable for 10 miles up the country, near to Dolgellhen, where small sloops are built. Charcoal is also made in this county.

*Leases.*—In this county, as in those I have had already occasion to mention, no leases are granted for such a length of time as to encourage farmers to make improvements.

THE END.





